



**REMARKS OF KEITH E. GOTTFRIED
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

**PRESENTED AT HIS
SWEARING-IN CEREMONY AS GENERAL COUNSEL
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2005,
4:00 P.M., LOCAL TIME
ROBERT C. WEAVER FEDERAL BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC
[as prepared for delivery]**

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for that generous and very kind introduction. I am very grateful to you and President Bush for the trust and confidence you both have placed in me in choosing me to be General Counsel of HUD. I am honored by your willingness to entrust me with a leadership position on issues that are of great importance to our nation and which are of deep interest to me personally. There is no way to repay the confidence that you and President Bush have shown in me other than to do the best job I possibly can do in service of the American people and this great nation and I will try to do that every day to the best of my abilities.

Going back to 1947, eighteen men and women have come before me and very honorably occupied this position at HUD and its predecessor agencies so I am aware of and respectful of this office's heritage and legacy. Previous General Counsels continued to distinguish themselves long after they left HUD. Just to name two, Frank Keating who served as General Counsel from 1989 to 1993 went on to become a two-term Governor of the State of Oklahoma from 1995 to 2003. My good friend, Judge Nelson Diaz, who served as General Counsel from 1993 to 1997 and is with us today, went on to become City Solicitor or Chief Legal Officer of Philadelphia, the 5th largest city in the United States, from 1991 to 2004.

As I forthwith commence the duties of the position that you and President Bush have chosen me for, I pray that God may give me the

wisdom and prudence to do my duty in the true sprit of this great nation of ours. I also pray that the Almighty may give me the vision to see the way clearly to a better life for our fellow citizens.

Mr. Secretary, I pledge to you that I will embrace the responsibilities and duties of the position of General Counsel with an abundance of enthusiasm, vigor and dedication. I am committed to assisting you in your ongoing efforts to make HUD a more effective, efficient and responsive institution, one that operates in accordance with the highest ethical and professional standards, both for its employees and for its program participants and beneficiaries. Additionally, I am committed to assisting you in your ongoing efforts to create a culture that inspires confidence in the integrity of HUD's programs on Capitol Hill and with all of HUD's program participants and beneficiaries.

Mr. Secretary, as many in this room can attest to, you have brought to HUD inspiring leadership, dedication and compassion, qualities I will strive to emulate as General Counsel. As you continue to lead HUD in strengthening our nation's communities, promoting affordable housing, dismantling the barriers to home ownership, expanding homeownership opportunities for all Americans, particularly low- and moderate income families, meeting President Bush's goal of at least 5.5 million new minority homeowners before the end of the decade, ending chronic homelessness, vigorously enforcing fair housing, civil rights and anti-discrimination laws, and, of course, of course, providing housing and other desperately-needed relief to the victims of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, it is for me the honor of a lifetime to serve as your General Counsel.

Mr. Secretary, with your indulgence, I would like to introduce my wonderful wife Cindy. It is due to her love and support, and with the grace of God, that I am here today and it will be with her love and support, and with the grace of God, that I will be able to carry out the important responsibilities that are now before me. I thank her for being my closest adviser and my best friend. I appreciate her more and more every day.

I would also like to introduce my mother Rosalie from whom I first learned the benefits that attach to homeownership and being a vested member of a community, and who has sacrificed so much so

that I would have the opportunity to pursue my personalized version of the American dream.

I am honored and humbled that so many of my friends and current and former colleagues are here today to bear witness to one of the most meaningful and momentous events in my life to date. I appreciate you all coming.

I very much appreciate Deputy Secretary Bernardi for all his time in assisting with today's ceremony. We are very fortunate to have at HUD's helm two leaders who understood public housing long before they came to HUD. As many of you know, Secretary Jackson is the first HUD Secretary to ever run a public housing authority. Secretary Jackson knows public housing. He managed the Housing Authorities in St. Louis, Washington, DC and Dallas and brings a unique perspective to HUD. As many of you may also know, Deputy Secretary Bernardi is the former Mayor of Syracuse, New York where he worked tirelessly to make Syracuse a more vibrant urban center and to draw families back into that City through home-ownership programs.

I also appreciate that a number of my other colleagues from HUD are here today. We have a number of Assistant Secretaries here today and I want to take a moment to recognize them. Among those joining us today are Brian Montgomery, Assistant Secretary for Housing and the Federal Housing Commissioner, Steven Nesmith, Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, Kim Kendrick, Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, Orlando Cabrera, Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing, Pamela Patenaude, Assistant Secretary for Community Development, Keith Nelson, Assistant Secretary for Administration, Darlene Williams, Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research and Cathy MacFarlane, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. Thank you all for being here today. Having gotten to know each of the Assistant Secretaries over the past few months, I know how honored I will be to work with them as we meet the challenges that lie ahead.

I appreciate very much that joining us today is my good friend, Judge Nelson Diaz, who served honorably as the General Counsel of HUD

from 1993 to 1997, and now serves as a Partner with the Philadelphia law firm of Blank Rome LLP. I also want to thank him for so generously agreeing to deliver some remarks this afternoon.

Speaking of folks from Philadelphia, I appreciate that my old friend of close to twenty years, Pedro Ramos, the Managing Director of the City of Philadelphia, is with us today. Pedro is a great example of someone who has demonstrated a strong commitment to public service. Since graduating from law school, Pedro has served as the head of the Philadelphia School Board, as City Solicitor and now as Managing Director of Philadelphia, which is the second most powerful governmental position in Philadelphia.

I know we also have with us today many of the attorneys and staff members of HUD's Office of General Counsel, including Deputy General Counsel George Weidenfeller and most of the Associate and Assistant General Counsels. The HUD Office of General Counsel is the largest legal office in the world dedicated to providing legal advice on housing and urban development issues. I consider myself fortunate to be able to work with such a dedicated, experienced and knowledgeable group.

In particular, I want to recognize one special staff member of the Office of General Counsel, Gwendolyn Curry, my Executive Assistant. Since I arrived at HUD this past August, Gwen has been my HUD tour guide. She is an incredibly dedicated, valued and integral member of my team. Gwen is responsible for organizing today's ceremony and celebration and I am very appreciative of all her hard work in bring this very special event together.

The position of General Counsel at HUD is a great honor, a wonderful opportunity and a tremendous challenge, but it is a position I believe that I have been preparing for my whole life. Over the past two decades, I have been in the accounting and auditing business, the legal business and, most recently, the computer software business. Today, when folks ask me what I do for a living I tell them I am in the hope business because that is the "business" of HUD. Having been on the job for a little over seven weeks, I can tell you that this is the most gratifying position I have ever held though certainly not the most financially rewarding.

I cannot begin to articulate how honored and humbled I am to be here today and to be able to assume the position of General Counsel of HUD. I come from a very modest upbringing and never did I imagine growing up in Queens, New York that one day I would be nominated by the President of the United States of America to serve the American people in this position.

I feel very strongly that to those to whom much is given much is expected and that, as a member of a compassionate society, I have a duty to give something back to the nation that has given me so much.

The opportunity to serve as General Counsel of HUD is a particularly fitting opportunity for me to give something back to our great nation, not only because of my background and experience as a lawyer and as a seasoned legal executive in the private sector, but also because of a deep personal connection that I share with HUD's mission.

In 1967, one year after the cornerstone was laid for this building, the Robert C. Weaver Federal Building, my parents purchased their first home in Queens, New York using a modest down payment and a thirty-year, fixed-rate mortgage. My parents separated some years later and throughout much of my childhood, my mother was a single parent raising a family on a teacher's salary. Money was often tight, but above all my mother knew the importance of keeping our home, rather than heeding advice to the contrary to move us to a smaller rental apartment to save money. My mother, the daughter of immigrants, had grown up in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn, New York where she shared a one bedroom apartment with her parents and three siblings, so she knew all too well that this was not the environment she wanted for her family.

Instead, she took on extra classes and worked overtime and during vacations so she could afford the mortgage payments because she knew the benefits of remaining a member of the "ownership society."

She knew that by keeping her family in a home that she worked hard to own and a community that she took a stake in, she was providing the best possible atmosphere for my younger sister and I to succeed.

Like President Bush and Secretary Jackson today, my mother recognized the value and benefits of homeownership. She believed, and continues to believe, that homeownership plays an immeasurable contribution to a family's stable living environment.

The living environment that my mother worked so hard to be able to afford, provided our family with a great deal of stability. It not only instilled pride in us but it also showed us the importance of community. I learned first-hand the benefits of being part of a close-knit community where your neighbors feel like family and where homeownership translates into greater concern for your community and the welfare of your neighbors.

My mother's home and community continue to be sources of great pride to her. Almost forty years after purchasing her home, she remains deeply active in, and committed to, her community.

So for me the mission of HUD is a rather personal one. I have seen the benefits of homeownership and I have seen the power of community. Now that I have the opportunity to help make a difference and bring hope to millions, I will do everything I can to maximize the opportunity and to carry out my duties to the fullest.

I am reminded of something that former President Theodore Roosevelt once said, which I think appropriately summarizes my approach towards my new position at HUD. He said, "Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

I think that the definition of "work worth doing" is different for every person but I believe that the opportunity to serve as General Counsel at HUD is truly my "work worth doing" and I am committed to working hard at it because I want others to share in the prize that I have already been lucky enough to experience.

Thank you again for coming.

God bless you all and God bless the United States of America.